

Approved by

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THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

AS SEEN THROUGH THE NOVELISTIC WORKS

OF MARTÍN LUIS GUZMÁN  
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by

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## PREFACE

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PREFACE

The Mexican Revolution, which disrupted the lives of our neighbors from 1910 to 1920 and continues to bring changes to today's Mexico, has entered literature through the work of many writers. Each author, having his own perspective on this turning point in his nation's history, has portrayed the Revolution differently. Mariano Azuela, who served as a doctor on the battlefields, saw the Revolution as a great upheaval of the masses, who had to revolt even though they could not clearly state their goals. Nellie Campobello was a child during these years, and her novels reflect the perspective of one to whom the bloodshed and death of the Revolution were ordinary occurrences. Gregorio López y Fuentes fought the United States troops at Veracruz and then participated in battles in the provinces; he saw the Revolution through the eyes of the peasants and soldiers who died in it. And Martín Luis Guzmán, an observer in the circle of leaders of the Revolution, saw the upheaval as the manipulation of power by various caudillos, some idealistic and some opportunistic. The masses are not important in his view of the Revolution, nor did upheaval ever become the norm for him.

It is the purpose of this paper to understand the Revolution through the novelistic works of Guzmán, to see it from his distinctive perspective. Selection of the works to be treated is not too difficult, since the bulk of his writings were journalistic and could not be considered as creative works. Of the works which might be considered because they are literature rather than journalism or because they deal with the Revolution, two must



be eliminated from consideration here: La querrela de México, although it deals with causes of the Revolution, is actually a collection of political essays rather than a novelistic work, and Mina, el mozo is a biography of a Spanish guerilla hero rather than a soldier in the Mexican Revolution. The works which remain are all creative, novelistic works based on the historical facts of the Mexican Revolution. These works are El águila y la serpiente, La sombra del caudillo, and Memorias de Pancho Villa. Examination of each of these writings for treatment of the Revolution, its ideals and goals, its successes and failures, will provide an understanding of what the Revolution was and is to the people of Mexico and especially to Guzmán.

The method of study used in this paper will be as follows: After an introductory chapter of the historical events of the Revolution and the life of Martín Luis Guzmán, one chapter will be devoted to each of the three books under consideration. El águila, being the first one to be printed, will be treated first, and Memorias de Pancho Villa (which was published last and includes several volumes published over a number of years) will be discussed last. A concluding chapter will follow, in which an evaluation of Guzmán's place in Mexican literature and history will be made.

## I. Introduction to Guzmán and His Times

Because the literature of Guzmán is so closely tied to the historical events of the Revolution, an understanding of what happened during those years is necessary if his works are to be fully understood.<sup>1</sup> The Revolution began in 1910, when Francisco Madero led an uprising against Porfirio Díaz. The issue which triggered Madero's revolt was re-election, for Díaz had in effect been in office as president since 1887. It had been rumored that he would not seek office in 1910. Madero offered himself as a candidate against Díaz when the rumors proved false; nevertheless, Díaz and his vice-presidential choice were "re-elected." Madero's call for resignations from these two and his demand for honest elections were the beginning of revolt, for many Mexicans had become ready for a change. The Díaz regime had been one of peace and prosperity, but the peace had been maintained by restrictive measures and the prosperity had benefited only the rich elite who were friends of the president. The need for land reform had grown as the haciendas got bigger and peasant fields, smaller. The efforts of labor to unionize had been crushed. Because of support from all of these neglected sectors of society, Madero's revolution was successful within a year, and new elections put him in the presidency in 1911.

Although the new president was an aristocrat, he felt that he had a calling from the spirit world to redeem his country, and his aims were therefore high. He promised free elections and democracy, but was not a strong enough man to implement these reforms in the face of the deep-rooted

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<sup>1</sup>Information on the historical events of the Revolution is taken from the following sources: Hubert Herring, A History of Latin America, (New York, 1965), pp. 354-375; Antonio Castro Leal, La novela de la Revolución Mexicana, (Mexico, 1965), I, 18-25; Howard F. Cline, Mexico, Revolution to Evolution, (London, 1962), pp. 24-30.

undemocratic habits left over from the Díaz dictatorship. Seeing that their revolutionary hero was unable to bring revolutionary changes to national political life, other popular leaders resumed their fighting. In the south Emiliano Zapata drew great followings with his cry for agrarian reform. In the north rose up Pascual Orozco and Venustiano Carranza. In Mexico City itself, reactionaries led by Bernardo Reyes and Felix Díaz were plotting a counter-revolutionary movement to re-instate the old regime. All of this plotting led to the Decena Trágica in February of 1913, during which Mexico City was swept by bloody fighting. Madero called on his general Victoriano Huerta to defeat the reactionary forces, for Huerta had led the troops which managed to defeat Orozco. But Huerta had his own ambitions, and during the fighting in the capital he got control of the situation and then betrayed his president.

February 22, 1913 marked the death of Madero and his vice president, and the beginning of Huerta's presidency. Conservative elements in Mexico welcomed Huerta, for he set about restoring a Díaz-type peace by dictatorship. But it was too late to go back to this sort of society; too many hopes for a better one, and too many leaders who had those hopes or took advantage of them, had arisen. These leaders revolted against Huerta. Chief among them were Zapata, Pancho Villa (leader of the Northern Division), Álvaro Obregón, and Venustiano Carranza. The latter proclaimed himself commander of the Constitutional Army. Huerta was literally surrounded by the armies of these caudillos, and in 1914 he finally had to flee the capital before Obregón and Carranza marched in. As head of the Constitutional Army, the latter called a convention to determine who was to head up the government, and this convention named Carranza chief of the army and president. However, two powerful leaders refused to attend the meeting,



afraid that too much power was being given to this man who seemed to them to be an unlikely instrument of reform. These two, Villa and Zapata, called for the removal of the convention to Aguascalientes. The purpose was to overcome the divisions which threatened to develop between the Villa-Zapata group and Carranza. As a compromise, Carranza was re-named commander of the army and Eulalio Gutiérrez, president. Carranza, refusing to accept this action, made the break between himself and the Villa-Zapata group complete. Although the latter's troops gained control of Mexico City and the two leaders occupied the presidential palace, Carranza still felt himself to be Mexico's government, and he set up his own capital at Veracruz. Around these two centers of power, Veracruz and Mexico City, the local leaders coalesced, and fighting between the two factions was severe. Eventually the military skills of Carranza's general Obregón produced several decisive defeats of Villa. Since Carranza also controlled the flow of arms from the United States, had revenue from the Veracruz customs houses, and made several proclamations of reform, he was successful in regaining Mexico City.

By this time, Carranza's control over the country was fairly well-established, so in 1917 he was able to convoke a convention which drew up the revolutionary Constitution of 1917. Although Carranza himself was not one who cared much for the ideas of social revolution, there were many at the convention who did, and the Constitution reflected their ideals. Ownership of land was seen to rest with the nation, which could apportion it to individuals and restrict its use in the public interest. Labor was granted many new concessions (the eight-hour day, no child labor, employer's responsibility for accidents, the right to organize). Separation of Church and State were re-affirmed, as was representative government.

Carranza attempted to continue his control of political life in two ways. First, he allowed the assassination of the chief revolutionary who was still fighting, the popular hero Zapata. Second, he attempted to impose his own choice as the next president when the 1920 elections approached. Popular revolts led by Obregón put a stop to the latter plan, and during the fighting Carranza was killed. Obregón was elected president for the 1920-24 term.

The revolution is generally considered to have ended in 1920 with the death of Carranza. But since the next period, implementation of the Revolution, is the subject of one of Guzmán's novels, La sombra del caudillo, it should be described here. Obregón eliminated opposition by giving Villa a large hacienda, and by pardoning or exiling other leaders. While making personal gains from the Revolution (such as his very large estate), he made many concessions to the largest labor union, some beginnings in agrarian reform, and considerable advances in the educational system. Political favors were liberally used to keep rival power groups under control, and Obregón's power was great enough to crush revolts when he named his own successor. In 1924 that successor, Plutarco Calles, became president. Calles' term was one in which organized labor grew, and more land was expropriated for the poor. His efforts to break the power of the Church resulted in a three-year protest strike by the clergy and the armed combat of the Cristero revolts. In 1928 he had Obregón elected as his successor, but the latter was assassinated before taking office. Calles' men served in the presidency until 1934, however. This whole period was one of imperfect implementation of the goals of the Revolution.

The principles for which the Revolution was fought can be deduced from the events which led to revolt and from the Constitution of 1917.

An end of the dictatorship ("no re-election") was one of these. Land reform was another. The operation of the country for the benefit of the entire populace rather than the presidential clique was an aim. Rights for labor were also demanded.

The life of Martín Luis Guzmán is closely tied to the events of the Revolution. It has been pointed out that his background, character, and life all prepared him to be the historian par excellence of the Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Evidence of this fact is first seen in his parentage. His father, a high official in the federal army, was fatally wounded in one of the first battles of the Revolution, but he confessed to his son before he died that those who were rebelling against Díaz had right on their side.<sup>3</sup> Guzmán's literary life began during his student years with his publication of the bi-weekly review Juventud. By 1908, the twenty-one-year-old law student was writing for the most important daily paper in the capital. There, his liberal leanings led him to join the Ateneo de la Juventud, a group of young writers who were liberal in politics and of reformist intent in culture. "From this moment," says one of his biographers, "the life of Martín Luis Guzmán and the process of the Revolution will be intimately intermixed."<sup>4</sup> His political life as such began in 1911, when he was named a delegate to the convention of the Partido Liberal Progresista. He became a maderista, an ardent admirer of Madero and his ideals, and began to write against the Díaz regime in El Honor Nacional, a periodical published at the capital city. When Díaz finally

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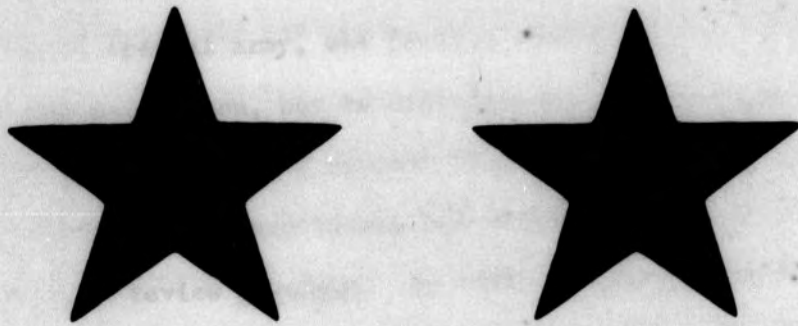
<sup>2</sup>Helen P. Houck, "Las obras novelescas de Martín Luis Guzmán," Revista Iberoamericana, III (February, 1941), 139.

<sup>3</sup>Castro Leal, I, 203.

<sup>4</sup>Ermilo Abreu Gómez, "Martín Luis Guzmán," Revista Interamericana de Bibliografía, IX (June, 1959), 120.



# **CORRECTION**



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left the presidency, Guzmán took part in the demonstrations supporting Madero. During these early revolutionary experiences, he established the habit of carrying a notebook in which he took notes on events, conversations, and his own impressions of them.<sup>5</sup> This on-the-spot record provided much of the vivid and historically accurate detail in his novelistic works.

The death of Madero at the hand of Huerta was almost a personal tragedy to the young idealist, who had worked to inform the public about Huerta's intrigues. He decided to join the northern revolutionaries who were fighting Huerta, and was soon able to make contact with Carranza and his troops. Since he had promised his father not to become a military man, Guzmán refused military commission but accepted posts as a civilian.<sup>6</sup> However, the authoritarian Carranza and Guzmán did not get along well, a fact which is evident in El águila y la serpiente, and Guzmán soon transferred his loyalty and his service to Villa. Carranza had him imprisoned for a short time because of his defection, but the Convention of Aguascalientes soon set him free. In fact, in the government set up at the Aguascalientes meeting, Guzmán was named advisor to the Secretary of War. His adherence to that government, when Villa split with its president Gutiérrez, came close to getting him into trouble with the ferocious Villa, but, as recounted in the last pages of El águila, he managed to get Villa's permission to go to the United States and thus escaped his wrath.

With the coming to power of Carranza, Guzmán exiled himself to Spain, where he wrote his first book, La querella de México, a group of essays giving an account of his country's problems. After spending some time in New York, where he directed the newspaper El Gráfico, the journalist

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<sup>5</sup>Houck, p. 143.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

returned to Mexico (1920). There he founded El Mundo, an important paper in which he supported Adolfo de la Huerta for the presidency. When Obregón defeated his candidate, Guzmán was again uncomfortable and unwelcome in Mexico, so he returned to the United States, then to Spain, where he stayed until 1936, at which time the Civil War prompted his departure.

This long stay in Spain was very important in the literary formation of Guzmán.<sup>7</sup> He had opportunity to observe the serious, disciplined concern for literature of his Spanish counterparts, and to do some reflective work. This training bore fruit in the form of three books published in Spain during his exile: El águila y la serpiente, La sombra del caudillo, and Mina, el mozo. But Guzmán was not inactive in politics during these years: When the Spanish Republic triumphed, he collaborated with its president, and served as director of the Spanish periodical El Sol. It was politics which sent him back home to Mexico, as has been stated above. From this time on, his Mexican political activities were to be few,<sup>8</sup> as he turned his attention to other fields. He began his most ambitious literary undertaking, Memorias de Pancho Villa, in 1938. The founding of the still-important periodical Tiempo and the patronizing of a series of Mexican history books also claimed part of his time. In 1958 Guzmán became a member of the Academia Mexicana, a counterpart of the Real Academia Española, and in the same year he received the national prize for literature.

This brief sketch of Guzmán's life reveals how his personal experiences equipped him to write so well of the Revolution. His personal contact with most of the important revolutionaries between 1911 and 1915 allowed accurate observations of the history about which he wrote. His own ability

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<sup>7</sup>Abreu Gómez, p. 122.

<sup>8</sup>Houck, p. 142.

to see into political motives and understand the characters of the revolutionaries he knew added depth to his historical accounts. Stanton has written, "If one were asked what distinguishes Martín Luis Guzmán's contribution to the literature of modern Mexico, the reply might well be that in his grasps of the motives of actions he shows a complete mastery and a great sincerity."<sup>9</sup> His familiarity with other cultures and literatures made Guzmán's style more dignified and rich than that of many revolutionary writers.<sup>10</sup> And the fact that he had opportunity to live the material of his books gives his works energy and truthfulness.<sup>11</sup> His extensive experience in journalistic writing certainly had an effect on his style of writing in the novelistic works. However, the question of artistry versus journalistic style in Guzmán's work can be better answered after the works themselves have been considered.

It is his life, his own experience in the Revolution, which gives Guzmán his distinctive perspective on this great conflict. While other revolutionary writers (with the exception of Vasconcelos) participated in the Revolution at lower levels and therefore saw it as a movement of the masses, Guzmán moved among its leaders and saw it as manipulation of power by a few. For him, the Revolution was controlled far above the level of the disinherited masses; the people could only implement the will of the leaders.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Guzmán has little sympathy for the masses,<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ruth Stanton, "Martín Luis Guzmán's Place in Modern Mexican Literature," *Hispania*, XXVI (May, 1943), 137.

<sup>10</sup>Manuel Pedro González, *Trayectoria de la novela en México* (Mexico, 1951), p. 203.

<sup>11</sup>Abreu Gómez, p. 135.

<sup>12</sup>John S. Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel* (Austin, 1966), p. 201.

<sup>13</sup>Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez, "La novela de la Revolución Mexicana y su Clasificación," *Hispania*, XLII (December, 1959), 529.



as we will see when examining his treatment of the zapatistas in El águila. Because of his own birth and upbringing, he is unable to understand the Revolution from below, and his lack of concern for the people springs not from lack of desire to sympathize with them but from this limitation which his own experience imposed on him.<sup>14</sup> He had never lived the Revolution among the masses, so he could not see it through their eyes. As John Brushwood points out,<sup>15</sup> his view of the Revolution from above fails to give a complete picture of the event, just as Azuela's view of it from below does. Nevertheless, Guzmán's ability to portray so well that which he did know makes his novelistic works extremely valuable in understanding the force and sweep of the Mexican Revolution. Let us now turn to a consideration of each of these works in order to see the Revolution as Guzmán saw it.

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<sup>14</sup>González, p. 207.

<sup>15</sup>Brushwood, p. 201.

## II. El águila y la serpiente

El águila y la serpiente, first of Martín Luis Guzmán's novelistic accounts of the Revolution to be published, appeared in 1928. It has been said that if Mariano Azuela's novel of the Revolution is about los de abajo (the underdogs), El águila is a novel of los de arriba (the upper echelons).<sup>1</sup> In plot, Guzmán's novel is a record of the historical events of the Revolution, beginning after Huerta seized power and ending a few months before Carranza solidified his control over the country in 1915. Guzmán recounts these chaotic events and brings a kind of form and order to them<sup>2</sup>--an order which allows the reader to understand the spirit of those years as well as the occurrences. But if this is the plot of El águila, the theme is something more: the breakdown of Guzmán's idealism about the Revolution, the disillusionment which grew and grew until his only refuge was flight from Mexico to the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Through the pages of El águila y la serpiente, many aspects of the Revolution can be understood. For Guzmán presents, from his own perspective, the things which seemed to him most important in the struggle: the leaders, the manipulation of power, the clash of idealism with reality during these troubled years. From the author's point of view, the leaders were the most important factor of the Revolution, the force

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<sup>1</sup>González, p. 207, quoting Juan Uribe Echavarría, "La novela de la Revolución Mexicana y la novela hispanoamericana actual," Anales de la Universidad de Chile, 1936.

<sup>2</sup>Castro Leal, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup>Harriet V. Wishnieff, "El águila y la serpiente", The Nation, CXXVII (October 17, 1928), 401.

which controlled the other aspects with which he deals, such as the common soldiers, the motives, and the results. Therefore, we will first look at these men through Guzmán's eyes. Then we will move to the other factors of the Revolution over which these leaders had so much power.

Among the leaders, the two who are most important in El águila are Pancho Villa and Venustiano Carranza. This is natural, since during the time with which the novel deals, power was coalescing around these two. Guzmán comes to be attached to Carranza first. Before he meets him, the author=narrator hears Carranza "praised without ceasing" for his "greatness."<sup>4</sup> In spite of this praise, he is somewhat predisposed against the commander of the constitutional Army, for somehow Carranza makes him think of Porfirio Díaz (p. 233). At their first interview, however, he finds Carranza "simple and serene, intelligent, honored, able" (p. 233). Sharing his first meal at Carranza's table, Guzmán finds that the Commander never loses track of the conversation and is listened to with great respect, even when he makes mistakes (p. 236). The military music which accompanies Carranza is worrisome, however, for it evokes the marches which always accompanied Díaz (p. 237). Guzmán's first break with the Commander comes one evening at mealtime. Carranza gives a pompous speech on the superiority of spontaneous fighting over scientifically organized warfare, and ends by saying that "in life. . . good will is the only indispensable and useful thing" (p. 238). The author contradicts him, and although Carranza only smiles in a protective way, Guzmán knows that his daring contradiction will never be forgiven.

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<sup>4</sup>Martín Luis Guzmán, El águila y la serpiente, in Antonio Castro Leal, La novela de la Revolución Mexicana (Mexico, 1965), I, 227. All further page references to the novel will be from this edition, and page numbers will be incorporated into the text.

The author's cautiousness about the Commander's ability to carry out the ideals of the Revolution becomes increasingly apparent from this point on. He begins to refer to Carranza's concept of government as Machiavellian (p. 253), and states that this "revolutionary" leader dreamed of being like Díaz (p. 262). After being sent on a mission to New York, Guzmán returns to find that "near don Venustiano, intrigue and the lowest adulation flowered viciously" (p. 293). He finally makes the break complete and offers his services to Pancho Villa, saying that Carranza is leading the country not to a new way of life but only straight back to caudillism (p. 308). All further references to Carranza in the novel are additions to this picture of him. Guzmán sees significance in the fact that Carranza (and his men) did not know the difference between what was their property and what belonged to another, and the public soon coined a new word, carrancear, which meant "to rob" (p. 341). Carranza, for Guzmán, becomes a traitor to the Revolution.

But what of Carranza's rival, Pancho Villa? He is the most visible alternative to Carranza, but can he be the great revolutionary leader? Guzmán is faced with this question. At his first encounter with Villa, the author's fascination with him begins. He sees the guerilla leader as ferocious, but his force is of one who defends himself, not of one who attacks (p. 231). The image which Guzmán uses to describe Villa at this meeting is striking: He compares him to a jaguar "now domesticated for our work [of winning a military victory for the Revolution] or for what we thought was our work; a jaguar which we stroked caressingly, trembling for fear he might strike us" (p. 231). Nevertheless, on leaving him, the narrator thinks, "Yes, now we are winning! Now we have a man" (p. 232). He believes Villa can win the Revolutionary battle. Later,



when Guzmán joins Villa's forces, he is aware that this man creates a certain atmosphere that those around him feel and thrive upon (p. 296). The doubt remains, however: Being uneducated but very strong, can Villa be leader of a purifying, regenerating movement? Probably not, for he cannot understand the principles for which the Revolution is being fought. But he is the only possibility, so Guzmán has to put his hope in Villa (p. 308).

Another image that evokes Villa's spirit for the author is his pistol. It is so much a part of this fighter that he "would not exist if his pistol didn't exist. . . . It is the center of his work and play, the constant expression of his intimate personality, his soul having taken form" (pp. 325-6). But in spite of the cruelty which often results from this strength, Villa has his moments of human regret. The most striking example is the episode in which he orders one of his generals to shoot one hundred fifty enemy soldiers who surrendered. After giving the order, he asks aides if they believe he was justified in commanding the execution. When they say fearfully that they believe he did wrong, Villa suddenly changes his order and waits tensely and anxiously for a telegraph message saying that his reversal arrived in time to save the men (pp. 373-6).

The author reveals his attraction to the rebel leader when he says about one talk with Villa, "The conversation of the Durango Revolutionary attracted me more each time because of the interest awakened in me by his observations, often unexpected, new, surprising" (p. 386). Guzmán, in this novel, is afraid of Villa, for even as he risks going to him (in the last chapter of the novel) to ask permission to leave Mexico, he trembles for fear that Villa will realize Guzmán is fleeing from him and will shoot him. But Villa believes in the author's loyalty and offers

him every aid to go to the United States, get his family, and return to stay with Villa always. Guzmán did not return in person, but he returned by way of his pen, for in 1938 he began to write Memorias de Pancho Villa, a work which he proposed to develop in ten volumes and which would give a different view of this leader of the Revolution.

Even though Villa and Carranza are the most fully characterized of the revolutionary caudillos in El águila, other leaders also appear, and it is in portraying them that Guzmán shows his talent for brief but clear sketches of personalities. Only the best-known in history will be mentioned here. José Vasconcelos (another revolutionary novelist and Minister of Education under Gutiérrez) is shown to be a man who, in spite of his belief in Buddhist conception of soul imprisoned in body, joined the revolutionary struggle to make a better physical life. His hospitality in welcoming other revolutionaries to his home is especially emphasized (p. 226), as is his sympathy for all men (p. 379). Villa, however, thinks of him as "nothing more than a traitorous intellectual" (p. 424). The latter opinion says as much about Villa's character as it says of Vasconcelos' make-up.

Obregón, the general who later became president of his country, is also portrayed by Guzmán. It is ironic that the first mention of him in the novel is the praise which Adolfo de la Huerta heaps on him for knowing that his place is in the military. Obregón does not want the military officials to become government officers. He realizes that the greatest disasters of Mexico have resulted from military rule (p. 243). Obregón's political documents reveal an attempt (which fails completely) to create literary masterpieces (p. 244). There is no denying that he is a good general (p. 245), but he is soon seen to be a prevarication. His

ideas and beliefs are all for the public benefit, rather than being sincere convictions of Obregón. (p. 246). Guzmán perceives that Obregón wants to be a new caudillo (p. 308).

Adolfo de la Huerta, a presidential candidate in the 1920's, also enters the novel. He is a fervent admirer of Obregón, as has been said, but is not contaminated with Obregón's farcical character. To the contrary, he takes the responsibilities of the Revolution quite seriously (p. 243).

Zapata, the main advocate of land reform, is seen by Guzmán as "crude but lovable" (p. 391), although his men are not seen in such a favorable light. He represents the contrasts of the Revolution as he, a roughly clad guerilla fighter, shows the provisional president Gutiérrez around the presidential palace. Zapata is untouched by desire for personal glory; even when he has charge of the palace, he chooses to live in a large and bare room with his men rather than one of the sumptuous chambers (p. 393). He and the others mentioned here are only a few of the personages who are mentioned by Guzmán in brief appearances. Others who appear have less influence on the course of the novelistic action or on history.

These are the leaders, in whom the power and the fate of the Revolution seem to Guzmán to be vested. But what of the men they lead, the common people for whom the Revolution was presumably fought? What part in the struggle does Guzmán attribute to them? As has been pointed out in the first chapter of this paper, Guzmán had little sympathy for the masses and no great belief in their influence on the course of the Revolution. He seldom speaks of them. The first time the common soldier is mentioned is in a description of the Yaqui Indians who, seated on top of a moving train, could not resist the impulse to shoot at the cows and mules as they rode by (p. 247). Their impulse to violence is

uncontrolled. The second appearance of the masses is on a night in Culiacán, when the troops of the revolutionary general are "drunkenness en masse" in the streets. They seem to form "the soul of a monstrous reptile, with hundreds of heads, thousands of feet"---not a very flattering picture (p. 260). Later in the novel, Guzmán boards a train and notes how rapidly everything goes downhill as the crowd takes over. People sit in the aisles, light small fires, use any available spot as a toilet (p. 280). "At first, some few travelers, still free of the uncivilizing wave, tried to impose some order; but soon, seeing that their efforts were useless, they stopped. The propensity to the lowest levels. . . was irresistible."

A revolting picture; yet the symbol of the masses at their worst is yet to come. For Guzmán this is the place of Zapata's men. When they come to the Convention at Aguascalientes, he says they increase "the moral and cultural poverty" there (p. 358). In the capital city they seem to be "half-naked rebels." In their crowded, smoky room at the presidential palace they stay drunk (p. 393), in a sort of "brutal orgy." There are other novels of the Revolution, written by men much closer to the masses (Tierra by Gregorio López y Fuentes is one example), in which Zapata appears as the greatest leader of the common people, the only one who had their needs at heart. But Guzmán had never lived the kind of life that would allow him to appreciate that point of view. He is not able to overcome his rather aristocratic aversion for teeming hordes of people, in spite of his belief that the Revolution was needed for their sakes.

It is evident, then, that in Guzmán's eyes the masses do not have the ability to guide the Revolution. Instead, the leaders manipulate



their power, each struggling to keep power for himself or (if he has more noble aims) to keep it away from those who will abuse it. "The Revolution in El águila y la serpiente is not the people in motion, but the manipulation of power," says John Brushwood.<sup>5</sup> Let us see how Guzmán conveys this idea. He first makes the reader aware of the struggle for power when he joins Carranza's troops and finds himself disliked by the Commander's subordinates, who fear they may be displaced by a newcomer (p. 237). When he is sent to Sinoloa to be part of the Revolutionary government there, he finds that the splits which were developing between various revolutionary officials there "were based more on individual considerations and concern for future power than on discrepancies about principles" (p. 252).

Guzmán soon finds that "the chief directors of the Revolution were very far from being, in my eyes, disinterested and idealistic enough that I should want to tie myself to them" (p. 270). Obregón is one of the highest leaders whom he accuses of the fault of self-interest; this general wishes to "assure the future predominance of himself and his group" (p. 293). Most of the generals at the Convention of Aguascalientes strike the author in the same way, answering their country's call "with their personal ambitions" (p. 357). And Carranza, of course, is the biggest manipulator of all. He and his men, according to Guzmán, wanted "free field for their fight for power; the possibility of converting into a new caudillism, stripped of socializing reforms, the Revolution born against the old caudillism" (p. 397).

This is what the author of El águila y la serpiente saw in his country's Revolution. But all of this maneuvering for power would not

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<sup>5</sup>Brushwood, p. 201.

seem nearly so ruthless if there were not also idealism involved in this novel as a contrast to political maneuvering. The author shows his own ideals, and those of others. Then he shows the brutality and disorder of the Revolution and how these realities clashed with the ideals--and the realities were stronger.

In the early days of the fighting, the idealism seemed strong to Guzmán: "In 1913 the Revolution, like all renovating movements in the beginning, was an undeniable, pure impulse of regenerating vitality, which showed itself visible and active even in the last details" (p. 251). He hopes for a new way of life for his nation (p. 262) when the Revolution succeeds. What were the ideals which some of Guzmán's characters felt were embodied in the Revolution? One was to generally "clean up" the country. The author especially felt the need for this step when he went from El Paso, Texas, to Ciudad Juarez in his own country. His companion, Neftalí Amador, vowed: "This is a pigsty. When the Revolution is successful, we'll clean it up. We'll make a new city, new and better than that on the other bank of the river" (p. 228). The end of caudillism, of personalistic rule, is also a big part of the new way of life that is coming (p. 307). Some generals tried to put these ideals into action by forbidding their men to rob and loot the houses of cities they took over (p. 342). And the author tried to put his ideals into action by suggesting ministers who were really qualified for their positions (p. 383). He believed at first that hope for the future of his country was possible.

But over against these ideals is set the inherent brutality and disorder of revolution. The author is repelled by such brutality, which often seems to him to be pointless. Because of his revulsion at such activity, he describes it quite vividly in several scenes. One of these

scenes, which as one reviewer says is seldom matched in literature for "stark realism and dramatic intensity," is the execution of five hundred prisoners by Fierro, Villa's chief assistant (pp. 301-307).<sup>6</sup> Fierro has the prisoners shut up in a corral. As his soldiers drive them across the open space in groups of ten, Fierro picks them off with his unerring marksmanship. He personally kills all of them in this way. Then Fierro spreads his blanket and sleeps in the corral, near the dead bodies. Guzmán states no disapproval of this massacre; he simply describes it in awful detail, and the reader can feel his revulsion. When it comes to a second brutal act, the shooting of three men for robbery (after a most summary gesture of a trial), the author is so upset by it that he engages in soliloquy on the subject. He decides that the outlines of a trial which were used were only "hypocritical details" and that the shooting was illegal and immoral (p. 321). Soon after this incident, he hears a report from another soldier of an even greater injustice done in the name of the Revolution (pp. 328-335). A revolutionary general, having need of money, had five citizens of a town arrested. Each had to pay a stated sum of money by a given hour, or be taken to the gallows. The first man scheduled to pay had no resources of any kind, so he was hanged before the horrified eyes of the other four. They had also said that they could not pay, but after the hanging, the money was put into the general's hands. He had planned the whole event knowing that the first man was unable to pay--and that his death was a sure key to funds from the others.

These are the realities of the Mexican Revolution as Martín Luis

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<sup>6</sup>I. A. Leonard, "The Eagle and the Serpent," Hispanic American Historical Review, XIII (August, 1933), 357.

Guzmán saw it: brutality and maneuvering for power. The clash of these realities with the ideals of Guzmán and others takes place again and again in El águila, and the result is increasing disillusionment of the part of the idealists. The author foresees this clash when idealists (Guzmán and some companions) first meet the fighters of the Revolution (Pancho Villa) (p. 231). At this first meeting, there is no conflict, but the author realizes how weak his ideas (coming only from books) are against the potential for force and destruction in Villa. Soon Guzmán has seen enough of the reality to make the previously quoted statement that the leaders were not idealistic enough to gain his loyalty (p. 270). The author does meet one lesser general who seems to him to understand "the sadness of this conflict. This man understood "the moral impossibility of not being with the Revolution and the material and psychological impossibility of achieving by the Revolution the regenerating ends that justified it" (p. 284). This is the conflict for Guzmán, too. During the Convention at Aguascalientes he observes the living clash of these two forces. On the one hand is "the diffuse, but desperately noble and active, aspiration for better ways of life," and its opponent is "the immediate incapacity. . .to calm the turbulences of that aspiration, forming them [the turbulences] into something livable, co-ordinated, and organic" (p. 395). Soon Guzmán is so depressed by the realities of the Convention that he feels that now "no one fought for the Revolution, but [they fought] for its booty" (p. 370).

One man becomes a symbol of the clash between ideals and realities and the resulting disappointments for idealists. He is don Valentín Gama, a professor of Guzmán's, whom the author suggests to president Gutiérrez as a cabinet member. Don Valentín is an expert in his field, and he has



a great willingness to serve his country. "Those who clamor for a country and flee the dangers and discomfort of making it, or trying to make it, are the only ones who don't deserve it," he says when Guzmán asks him to join the Cabinet (p. 395). But Gutiérrez's government is overrun by Villa, his Cabinet is dispersed, and Guzmán realizes that once the Revolution is in process, it is almost a law of nature that it will become brutal, disorderly, and destructive.

This is how Guzmán sees the Mexican Revolution in El águila y la serpiente: It is controlled by the leaders, who manipulate power; and the ideals which were strong when the fight began are not strong enough to prevent degeneration of the just war into brutality. Because of the wide range of time and space which Guzmán covers, his novel gives the reader a sense of the great force and sweep of the Revolution, much more so than a novel such as Frontera junto al mar by José Mancisidor, which focuses on one incident of this struggle. One can feel the Revolution through Guzmán's novel, which is one step toward understanding it.<sup>7</sup>

Before moving on to a consideration of Guzmán's second revolutionary novel, La sombra del caudillo, it would perhaps be well to point out that there is debate over whether or not El águila y la serpiente is a novel. This is a question which attracts every critic or reviewer who mentions this work. In this paper, El águila has been referred to as a "novel" simply for lack of a more convenient label. Houck calls the book memoirs,<sup>8</sup> but it is more than personal recollections, for Guzmán includes incidents which he did not experience himself. Brushwood calls it "literary reporting,"<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Wishnieff, p. 401.

<sup>8</sup>Houck, p. 143.

<sup>9</sup>Brushwood, p. 200.

but this label seems to neglect the considerable artistic achievements of Guzmán (choosing the dramatically effective event from history, using images to describe Valla). The author himself refused to classify his work as to form; he stated that he wished it to combine the best qualities of history, biography, and novel.<sup>10</sup> Despite the fact that the structure of this work is not novelistic but episodic, and that most of the incidents are recollections of history rather than creations of the writer, I am inclined to agree with Mariano Azuela on this point. Himself a novelist, Azuela said of the work,

It is enough for me to know that El águila is constructed with the novelist's technique, that it has the agreeableness and interest of the best novel, and it isn't the least bit important to me that it lacks or abounds in qualities which the critics demand in their indexes to classify it as such.<sup>11</sup>

Let us call it a novel, then, until a better term is suggested.

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<sup>10</sup>Castro Leal, p. 204.

<sup>11</sup>Mariano Azuela, Algo sobre la novela mexicana contemporánea (Mexico, 1960), p. 690.

### III. La sombra del caudillo

It is a Mexican axiom that "the worst enemies of liberty are the liberators. The liberator becomes a tyrant when he obtains power." In La sombra del caudillo Guzmán applies this axiom to the regimes of Obregón and Calles.<sup>1</sup> The corruption and political intrigue which characterize the reign of the nameless caudillo of this novel seemed to the writer to be characteristic of the regimes which were supposed to implement the aims of the Revolution. In Sombra, Guzmán turns away from the rural revolution, the actual armed struggle, and deals instead with the city and power politics.<sup>2</sup>

There is a historical basis for the plot of this novel, a basis which has been explained by Luis Leal.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Leal sees Sombra as a novela con clave, a novel in which each character is an actual historical figure. He explains that during Guzmán's years in Spain, the novelist heard of the shooting of fourteen political prisoners in Mexico, on the road between Cuernavaca and the capital city. One of those shot was a candidate for president. Guzmán's reaction to the incident was so strong that he began to write a novel about the political atmosphere in which such a thing could happen. In the novel, a struggle goes on between two

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<sup>1</sup>González, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup>Abreu Gómez, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup>Luis Leal, "La sombra del caudillo, roman à clef," Modern Languages Journal, XXXVI (January, 1952), 16-21.

candidates for president. Jiménez is the candidate approved by the reigning caudillo, and Aguirre is the Minister of War in the Caudillo's cabinet. Aguirre does not wish to run for president, for he knows the dangers of crossing the Caudillo, but his friends urge him on. Jiménez makes certain demands as to what Aguirre must do to prove he does not intend to run for office. These demands finally force Aguirre to make a break with the Caudillo and become a candidate. The historical struggle on which Guzmán modeled his novel is the rivalry of Calles and Adolfo de la Huerta for the office of president, as successor to Obregón. Calles was Obregón's candidate, and de la Huerta was a minister in Obregón's cabinet. De la Huerta resigned his cabinet post but said he still was not a candidate. His successor, like the man who followed Aguirre as Minister of War in the novel, discredited de la Huerta and was called to the Chamber of Deputies to justify this action. De la Huerta then had consultations with Obregón and Calles, and was asked to betray his friends who were urging the candidacy upon him--the same thing that was required of the fictional Aguirre. And like Aguirre, he decided instead to accept the candidacy. Guzmán departs from history, however, in having the Aguirre-Jiménez struggle end in political assassination. The Calles-de la Huerta fight did not reach this extreme. The murder of the fourteen political prisoners was actually an event of the Calles regime, but one of those was a candidate to succeed Calles.

According to Luis Leal, Aguirre of the novel represents both de la Huerta and the assassinated candidate. The fictional Jiménez is Calles; Leal points out that even their personalities are similar. Besides, Calles did try to get rid of his opponent's majority in the House by a plan for mass murder of the delahuertista leaders, as Jiménez does in



the novel. In reality and fiction, the plan failed because it was prematurely revealed by one of the proposed assassins. There is debate as to the identity of two characters in the novel. One is the Caudillo. Is he Obregón, president at the time of the battle for office, or is he Calles, president at the time of the mass political murder? Brushwood feels that he is Calles; because Calles' regime was most notorious for intrigue;<sup>4</sup> Leal says that because Obregón was president when the battle for office was fought, he is Obregón.<sup>5</sup> Actually, it appears that both the Calles and the Obregón regimes are being criticized for the political intrigues which surrounded them.<sup>6</sup> The second character whose identity is debated is Axkaná, the lone idealist and honest man in the novel, a friend of Aguirre. Although there is no historical counterpart for this man, it is evident that Axkaná is in many ways Guzmán himself. Guzmán was a delegate in the House during the de la Huerta-Calles struggle and observed the plotting first hand.<sup>7</sup> However, he did not enter into the action as a personal friend of one of the candidates, as did the fictional Axkaná. Axkaná stands in the novel, among the greedy politicians, as "something like the moral conscience of the Revolution."<sup>8</sup>

Like El águila y la serpiente, this novel reflects Guzmán's interest in the great leaders of the Revolution.<sup>9</sup> It is the plotting, intrigue,

<sup>4</sup>Brushwood, p. 202.

<sup>5</sup>Leal, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup>Chang-Rodríguez, p. 531.

<sup>7</sup>Houck, p. 147.

<sup>8</sup>González, p. 211. *See, La sombra del caudillo, in Antonio Castro Leal,*

*La vida en la Revolución Mexicana*, I, 467. All references to the novel

<sup>9</sup>Chang-Rodríguez, p. 531. references will be incorporated into the text.

*El águila y la serpiente*, p. 210.

and grappling for power of Aguirre and Jiménez to which most of the novel is devoted. It is still the leaders who determine the path of the Revolution. Nevertheless, the author seems to have more sympathy for the masses in this novel than he did in his earlier work. In El águila, Guzmán seems revolted by hordes of lower-class peoples. In Sombra, however, he is more sensitive to their plight. He sees these people as having no control over their fate, being used by the leaders, and he pities them. For example, when he looks out over the crowd of Indians brought in to stage a demonstration in favor of Jiménez's candidacy, Guzmán describes them in this way:

Many of the Indians from the haciendas had traveled fifteen or twenty kilometers and hadn't eaten for twelve hours; but they didn't show impatience or haste because of this; they waited their turn [at the noon meal] with great dignity. . . They ate with loyal sadness--with the sadness with which dogs in the street eat--but they did it, at the same time, with supreme dignity.<sup>10</sup>

Guzmán sympathizes with these Indians, but his sympathy does not delude him into believing that they have any control over their own political destiny. The entire novel is pervaded by the shadow of the Caudillo --a shadow whose power is accepted by all.<sup>11</sup> When the novel opens, Aguirre is the first character to express this acceptance. Aguirre asks Azkaná to convince his other friends to support Jiménez, "who is the candidate of the caudillo" (p. 427). Olivier, leader of the Progressive Radical Party (which wants Aguirre to run for office), accepts the Caudillo's power also. Olivier makes a political deal to stop supporting Aguirre in return for certain favors. When Jiménez decides to refuse the deal, Olivier refrains from arguing with him. "He guessed that it would be

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<sup>10</sup>Martín Luis Guzmán, La sombra del caudillo, in Antonio Castro Leal, La novela de la Revolución Mexicana, I, 467. All references to the novel will be to this edition; page references will be incorporated into the text.

<sup>11</sup>González, p. 210.

useless. Behind the words of the candidate there was something more than his personal decision, something more than his spirit: There was, doubtless, the will of the Caudillo" (p. 458). And that authority prevails, for the meantime.

Aguirre and Olivier do reach a point where they are ready to break with the Caudillo and stand against him. Guzmán does not make this break a sign of hope for Mexican politics, however. For those who are ready to oppose the Caudillo use his very tactics. They too make all decisions at the upper levels, disregarding the democratic process. They too look to military force as the path to office. Aguirre voices his willingness to adopt the Caudillo's techniques when he says, "It is clear to us that in Mexico the vote doesn't exist; what does exist is the violent dispute of the groups which want power, favored at times by public opinion. This is the real Mexican Constitution; the rest are pure farce" (p. 512). Even in the Progressive Radical Party itself, the top leaders make all the decisions. The convention of the party is characterized by Guzmán in this way: "There were the representatives of 'progressive radicalism' of the State of Mexico, always ready to hear and obey the voice of command of their leaders" (p. 461). Guzmán condemns not only the tactics of the Calles-Obregón regime so similar to those of the Caudillo, but more importantly, the willingness of the men under Calles and of the populace to acquiesce to such abuse of power. It is this willingness which really blocks democracy.<sup>12</sup>

Acceptance of the Caudillo's power and the type of government he represents is, in Guzmán's novel as well as in reality, a total disregard for the principles of democracy. Such disregard can be seen in the novel

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<sup>12</sup>Brushwood, pp. 202-203.

in several ways. One of these is the duplicity of the political leaders. Early in the struggle for the presidential candidacy, for example, many military leaders come to Aguirre to say, "You can count on my help." "Then they went, if they hadn't already gone, to see Hilario Jiménez, before whom they repeated, in the office of the Secretariat of Government, words which were equivalent" (p. 445). In plotting, it is even impossible to count on fellow plotters, because of the truth of an aphorism of which the Caudillo once spoke: "In Mexico, Olivier, there is no majority of deputies and senators which resists the caresses of the general treasury" (p. 456). And the Caudillo uses this method of promoting duplicity; he buys off many of the members of Congress who at one time supported Aguirre.

Besides being unreliable as far as political support is concerned, the leaders of both sides are hypocritical in voicing their motivations. A striking example of this hypocrisy occurs after the previously mentioned "spontaneous demonstration" of Indians shipped in to support the candidacy of Jiménez. After "demonstrating," the Indians are given a meal, "not very plentiful and not very good" in an open area, sitting on the grass. The party leaders, meanwhile, attend a banquet given by one of their number--a feast complete with printed menus and four wine glasses at each place. When it comes time for speeches, the host rises and says, "Who would dare to say now that we don't feel in our hearts the Revolution? Would we be eating here so contentedly if we hadn't first attended the public feast?" (p. 470). The falseness of this statement is so obvious that even the other guests cannot let it pass. An argument and brawl result.

Guzmán makes plain that the men he is writing about have no sense of honor, a concept needed as an underpinning for democracy. In the



first chapter of the novel, Aguirre says to Axkaná, "on my word of honor. . ." Axkaná answers jokingly, but with truth hidden behind his laughter, "Honor, between politicians--cursed is that which it guarantees" (p. 428).

Party leaders on both sides are further guilty of using their offices for private gain. For instance, Jiménez, candidate of the Caudillo, somehow obtains during the campaign the largest hacienda in northern Mexico--"without anyone knowing how and in spite of his terrible sermons against large land-holders" (p. 473). Aguirre, no less guilty, uses his office as Secretary of War to get money from the May-be Petroleum Company in return for certain favors. He affirms that he takes the money not for any ideological reason but "because I need it" (p. 483). As has already been pointed out, the lesser leaders are also willing to follow the example of their superiors, accepting pay-offs to support one or the other of the candidates.

These are the political faults of the men who are supposed to be implementing the Revolution. They are also guilty of personal faults, almost all being given to drunkenness and debauchery. These habits enter Guzmán's novel because they interfere with political activities: The great banquet given for political chiefs after the Indian demonstration ends in a drunken brawl, with leaders of the same party shooting at each other (pp. 471-72). Guzmán is certainly not presenting those who oppose the Caudillo as heroes; there are no heroes in this novel because its author saw no such men in the political situation he was using as a model. These men who change sides, speak hypocritically, disregard principle, and use public office for private benefit are perhaps no worse than the rival military chiefs described in Guzmán's

other two novelistic works. But this novel is more pessimistic than the other two simply because it is set in times of peace. The turmoil of battle made such activities understandable, if not justifiable, during the military phase of the Revolution. But this novel is of the times of political implementation of the Revolution. The atmosphere of intrigue is therefore more horrible and shocking.<sup>13</sup>

However, Guzmán does not make his characters totally evil; if he had, they would not be so human. Although the personal faults of the men certainly have much to do with their betrayal of the spirit of the Revolution, one feels at times that some of them are victims of the political situation which surrounds them.<sup>14</sup> As Carleton Beals points out, Guzmán occasionally shows the "nobler possibilities" of at least one of his characters, Aguirre. But they are possibilities which are smothered by the political environment.<sup>15</sup> Axkaná feels that his friend Aguirre is in such a position. After Aguirre fails to convince the Caudillo that he does not want to run against Jiménez, Axkaná listens to a report of that fruitless interview. As he watches his friend, he sees in Aguirre "the tragedy of the politician caught by the atmosphere of immorality and lying which he himself had created; the tragedy of the politician, once sincere. . ." (p. 450). As Aguirre talks, revealing his surprise and hurt that the Caudillo did not accept his word, he impresses Axkaná not as the immoral, cynical person he had previously seemed to be but as "almost ingenuous, even sensitive to the clash of the

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<sup>13</sup>González, p. 210.

<sup>14</sup>Houck, p. 147.

<sup>15</sup>Carleton Beals, "La sombra del caudillo," Saturday Review of Literature, VI (March 8, 1930), 804.

noble with the ignoble" (p. 449). When the political struggle reaches its inevitable end, and Aguirre is shot (along with his closest followers), by agents of the Caudillo, he dies with dignity. "In that fraction of an instant [before his death] he admired himself and felt himself--only before the panorama, seen in fleeting thought, of his whole revolutionary and political life--washed of his weaknesses. He fell, because he wished to, with the dignity with which others rise" (p. 528). Aguirre's dignity in death, and his moments of nobility, do not succeed in erasing from the reader's mind a generally bitter and pessimistic feeling, however. And this is as Guzmán intended. His own views of this period in the history of his country were bitter and pessimistic ones.

What is the place of this novel in literature? One answer to this question comes from looking at its influence on the general course of the novel. Manuel González, who regards Sombra as "one of the best novels of political environment which have been written up to now in Spanish America,"<sup>16</sup> points out that this work initiated the modern Mexican political novel, the novel of the Revolution made government.<sup>17</sup> After Sombra, other novels of this period were written. It is as if Guzmán had pointed out the novelistic possibilities of this period. This influence is one aspect of the importance of this novel in literature.

A second way to evaluate Sombra is to consider the creativity of the author. Brushwood has said that "the book is almost a great novel, but falls short precisely because the author, an excellent reporter, lacked the imagination of the novelist."<sup>18</sup> He bases his

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<sup>16</sup>González, p. 208. Chang-Rodríguez agrees with this evaluation (p. 531).

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>18</sup>Brushwood, p. 202.

evaluation on the fact that Guzmán followed closely the outlines of historical fact, and that only Axkaná is a created character having no counterpart in history. But Guzmán has used history in a creative way. Especially through Axkaná, he delves into the motivations of the men who made that history. And the way in which he organized the historical events is also creative. In fact, the construction of this novel and the maintaining of tension which comes about because of careful construction are the aesthetic strength of the novel.<sup>19</sup> The action builds to the high point of tension, accumulating and accelerating as the end approaches:<sup>20</sup> first, the unsuccessful attempt of Aguirre to convince the Caudillo he does not wish to oppose him; then the interview between the two candidates, which ends with a break between them; the kidnapping of Axkaná to intimidate Aguirre and his followers; the resulting decision of Aguirre to accept the candidacy; Aguirre's resignation from his office as Minister of War; the battle of words in Congress; the plot to kill the aguirrista leaders in Congress; the flight of the aguirristas from the capital; their arrest by troops they thought were loyal; and the inevitable massacre of the aguirristas beside the highway. After this climax, the novel ends with only a brief conclusion in which the wounded Axkaná escapes to the United States, and the general who served as executioner buys a large diamond with the blood-soaked money he took from Aguirre's body. By organizing all of his impressions about this phase of the Revolution around one incident, Guzmán achieves novelistic structure and conciseness.

In regard to construction and conciseness, Sombra is superior to

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<sup>19</sup>Abreu Gómez, p. 128.

<sup>20</sup>Houck, p. 148.



El águila.<sup>21</sup> El águila has a looser construction and ranges over a wider variety of incidents. But Guzmán's having limited himself in Sombra to one incident does not limit the depth of understanding of the Revolution which he imparts to the reader. The way in which the leaders operated, without regard for democracy, the way in which such methods were accepted as natural, is as clear as the picture Guzmán painted of the military leaders in El águila. But is it a fault of Guzmán as a novelist that he chose to make El águila a more loosely-constructed work? Perhaps there is something in the nature of the two time periods which demanded of the writer a different approach to each. During the military phase of the Revolution, dealt with in El águila, many military leaders fought largely independently of each other. Life was disorganized and action was scattered. To give a complete picture of what the Revolution was like in this phase, Guzmán had to incorporate incidents which occurred on many different fronts, which could not be tightly organized. During the political implementation of the Revolution, the time period which Guzmán writes about in Sombra, power had become localized in Mexico City. The central government had again gained recognition for itself as the authority of the country. The atmosphere of this time could thus be presented by concentrating on one incident, a struggle for the presidency, without sacrificing depth of treatment. Consideration of this difference between the two time periods makes the difference in artistic quality of the two words understandable. In spite of this difference, La sombra del caudillo takes its place as a better novel than El águila y la serpiente, though not as a better picture of a phase of the Mexican Revolution.

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<sup>21</sup>Beals concurs with this judgment in his review of Sombra, p. 804.

#### IV. Memorias de Pancho Villa

The biography of the revolutionary leader Pancho Villa was considered by Guzmán to be his major work. He planned to write ten volumes of the Memorias de Pancho Villa, though only five have been published to date. Guzmán's personal acquaintance with Villa during the early years of the Revolution were a rich source of information and understanding of his character and actions, but the author also had access to other sources. Some of Villa's papers were put into Guzmán's hands by Villa's widow, and others were obtained through the national archives. These included notes, telegrams, and documents on Villa, historical documents of the nation and of some states, and the "hoja de servicio" written by Villa, which served as a model for style. Using these sources, Guzmán wrote the Memorias as he believed Villa would have written them himself. The biography has the first person narration of an autobiography, and the style is that of the uneducated revolutionary chief who made grammatical errors and used the speech of his area, including redundancies and slang. While some critics state that the literary merits of this style are slight, few can deny that the author succeeded in his purpose, which was "not to depart from the language I had always heard Villa speak, and, at the same time, keep within the limits of literature."<sup>1</sup>

Guzmán's view of the Mexican Revolution is generally the same in this biography as it was in El águila y la serpiente, though his purpose

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<sup>1</sup>Abreu Gómez, p. 133.

was different. Guzmán wished to give through this work a picture of an important but confusing phase of the Revolution as well as a vindication of Villa's memory.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, he still sees the Revolution in terms of leaders who controlled the outcome of the national upheaval, rather than in terms of a mass movement by the populace. The leader who is most fully portrayed is, of course, Villa; but Carranza's part as a leader also receives much attention. Rather than seeing the victories or defeats of the Revolution as results of actions by the troops, Guzmán sees them as results of the decisions made by the leaders. And these decisions are also the determining factor in bringing about the splits between various factions.

But if it is important to understand that Guzmán in this work sees the Revolution in much the same way as he saw it in El águila, it is also important to realize that his view of Pancho Villa has changed. The earlier work reflects the impressions which the ferocious, sometimes brutal leader made on a young, idealistic observer. In Memorias, however, Guzmán's impression of Villa is a more mature one based on Villa's entire participation in the Revolution, taking into account the outcome of the war and the way its aims were implemented in the political arena.<sup>3</sup> Thus the author's earlier revulsion yet fascination with this interesting person evolves into an understanding of his motivations and an appreciation of the important part Villa played in both the military and the ideological victories of the Revolution. In this biography Villa appears not as a man who manipulated his vast power for his own advantage or through natural drives (as he does in El águila), but as one who tried to use his power

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<sup>2</sup>Houck, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

to bring about victories for the cause of the poor.

But before we can discuss how Guzmán felt Villa used his power, we must understand how the poor peon, Doroteo Arango, attained the powerful position held by Pancho Villa, Commander of the Northern Division of the Revolutionary Army. Guzmán traces the steps in this ascent to power. We meet the protagonist when he is Doroteo Arango, a peon working on a hacienda. He shoots the hacendado because of an insult to his sister, then flees to the mountains. There he adopts his new name of Francisco Villa and joins a gang of bandits. We watch Villa as his natural abilities make him leader of the gang. Finally, at his house in Chihuahua, he is approached by don Abraham González about joining the Revolution. Villa recounts movingly how González led him to understand that his fight against the rich was the same fight which Francisco Madero, himself a rich man, was leading. The bandit tells of his awakened hope that things might be better, and of the birth of his worship for Madero, who "showed his willingness to fight, him being a rich man, for us, the poor and oppressed."<sup>4</sup> When Villa first joined the revolutionary army, fifteen men came with him. Guzmán shows Villa's gradual ascension to leadership in the revolutionary forces as he recruits more men and makes wise military decisions. Finally, in September of 1913, a group of chiefs meet and form the Northern Division, choosing Pancho Villa as their Commander in Chief (II, 30-31).

In position of Commander of the Northern Division, Villa had much power. The major part of Guzmán's work is taken up with showing how Villa used that power, and how he justified using it in the ways that he did. An examination of some of his activities which are most often criticized or were most heavily attacked by his opponents during the war will

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<sup>4</sup>Martín Luis Guzmán, Memorias de Pancho Villa (Mexico, 1938), I, 65. All further references to the biography will be to this edition, and page references will be incorporated into the text.



show how Guzmán reacted to Villa's use of power.

One of these criticisms is that Pancho Villa was an uneducated bandit who had no motivation for fighting in the Revolution except a desire for personal wealth and power. Guzmán shows the injustice of such accusations. Villa was an uneducated man who did not know how to read and write when he entered the Revolution, but he had ideals and hopes for the struggle. These ideals were more primitive forms of the sophisticated ideas proclaimed by the intellectuals sympathizing with the Revolution. For example, Villa expressed the idea of a just war when reprimanded for so many killings, saying, "If we don't kill, how will we win? And if we don't win, what future awaits the cause of the people?" (IV, 66). He refused to take money offered him by Madero when Madero's presidency seemed assured and Villa was planning to return to civilian life, saying that he had fought "only to secure with victory the securities that had been denied to the poor" (I, 175). He stated that his purpose was to win the war for legitimate causes, not to gain personal glory (I, 245). And the basis of many of his activities was Villa's belief that the wealth of the nation belonged to the workers who produced it, not the rich who collected it (II, 46-47). The most moving statement of his ideals comes early in the biography, when Villa, leaving for his first revolutionary battle, looks back over Chihuahua and begins to cry; it is hard to "smother the cries which rose in my throat. Because I would have liked to cry, so that my companions could answer me: Viva el bien de los pobres! Viva don Abraham González! Viva Francisco Madero!" (I, 75). These are not the words of a man who had no ideals motivating him.

If one is to appreciate Villa's place in the Mexican Revolution it is important to understand that he did hold these beliefs about the cause

of the poor and that he always thought of himself as fighting for that cause. Only understanding this fact can one tolerate many of Villa's cruelties or apparent injustices during his military career. For example, let us look at the robberies and forced loans which Villa and his men imposed on the bankers, merchants, and other wealthy persons in the towns they controlled. The "bandit" always defended these activities on two counts: First, the money belonged to the nation, not the wealthy men who happened to have it in their hands. Second, Villa never used the money for personal expenses, but put it all into the battle for the cause of the poor. For instance, when agents of Carranza came to him early in the fighting to ask that he stop these robberies, Villa replied,

Here no one robs. What is taken from the towns is taken at my orders, and is for carrying on the campaign. . . Believe me: My soldiers don't rob and we don't loot the townspeople without motive. We need horses, arms, saddles, cattle, and money, and we seize it whenever there is any. But, as I see it, this is not robbery, but carrying out the duties which war imposes on us. (II, 18)

In a later episode he took gold coin from the mining bank, and allowed some of it to be distributed to his officers to satisfy their greed. But Villa made it plain that he himself took none of the coins.

Of all the gold from the pillars of the Miner's Bank of Chihuahua I hadn't taken a single coin for myself. Besides, the truth is, I didn't want to take any. Because I was seeing how many revolutionary men now began to waver from the sentiment of the true fight of the people and how many considered that fight, which was the fight of the poor against injustice and misery, as the best chance of their lives to find riches. (II, 173-4)

Besides his robberies, Villa's acts of cruelty or summary justice are often criticized as being an abuse of the great authority he had. But through Guzmán's work we can see why Villa felt he had to do these things. He felt that each act was needed to maintain unity within the revolutionary forces, to defeat the Federal Army, or to keep

the Revolution moving toward its proper goals. For example, when one of his generals committed an act of insubordination during a march, Villa ordered him seized and shot at once. An aide spoke of having a council of war to judge the man, but Villa replied,

Friend, I don't have time for those papers. Soldier or general that commits insubordination, that soldier or general I order shot. . . In wars of revolution, where men who feed passions against the commander come up, one can't permit even for a moment that the commander's authority be belittled or disputed. (II, 53)

Especially in the earlier volumes of the work, it is possible to understand many of Villa's seemingly cruel actions in this way. And he has moments of regret for his cruelty, sometimes even changing his orders for an execution if his aides offer him good reasons. In one instance he is persuaded by an assistant that it is unjust to execute the captured federal officers who were wounded, but that they should be put in the hospital instead (II, 39). In general, however, Villa felt acts of cruelty were necessary in battle: "Acts of war require that goodness be forgotten and deeds be done as circumstances require, killing where we have to kill, and pardoning if it is possible to pardon" (III, 139).

Citizens of the United States are especially prone to criticize Villa for his disregard for the rights of foreigners, saying he misused his power in failing to protect them. Again, Guzmán enables us to see this problem as Villa saw it. For him, the cause of the people was the most important thing; Villa tried to maintain good international relations (especially with the United States), but if the success of an act of the Revolution turned on this point, the rights of foreigners came second. When he took the town of Torreón, Villa called together the Spanish citizens, who had protected Victoriano Huerta, and told them that because of the international situation he wasn't going to shoot them, but that they were

exiled (III, 11-12). When a Japanese diplomat approached him about helping Japan fight the United States, he refused firmly, saying, "If the American people go to war with another country, and I am in a high position in the government, the people of Mexico will refuse the United States nothing they may ask in the way of materials of war."<sup>5</sup> Several times he spoke of world opinion watching him, and of his desire for the world to see his acts and the Revolution in a favorable light. On the other hand, he accepted Carranza's reply to a United States complaint about violations of the rights of foreigners: Carranza said, "If they remained, it was by their own choice, and they would have to suffer along with the Mexican inhabitants."<sup>6</sup> Although Villa was much at odds with Carranza by this time, he agreed on the justice of this statement. International good will was important, but it did not come ahead of the cause of the people, which could only triumph through forceful military action.

One last group of actions by Villa that is often seen as misuse of his power is his renunciation of loyalty to various men for whom he once fought. These reversals of attitude toward other revolutionary leaders have led one historian to declare that "Pancho Villa never served any cause but his own."<sup>7</sup> Guzmán shows that Villa felt each change was necessary if he was to be true to the cause of the people. The most important of these changes is, of course, in Villa's attitude toward Carranza. Early in the Revolution, when the fight against Huerta had just begun, Villa did accept Carranza as First Chief of the Army.

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<sup>5</sup>Martín Luis Guzmán, Memóirs of Pancho Villa, translated by Virginia H. Taylor (Austin; 1965), p. 397. Of course Villa is idealized in

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 451. often done in a historical work dealing with a folk

<sup>7</sup>Herring, p. 357.



However, his words of acceptance were these:

Tell don Venustiano Carranza that I adopt the Plan of Guadalupe, and that I accept him as First Chief, and that I am ready to obey him in everything that has to do with the Revolution, and the interests of the people; that if he is really a revolutionary he can be sure of my friendship and loyalty. II, 17)

Gradually the conviction grew in Villa that the First Chief was not a true revolutionary. Carranza was putting emphasis on unity through obedience to him, and made decisions in a rather autocratic manner. Villa sensed that Carranza feared the successes of Villa because they made Villa popular and therefore powerful. Villa held that "Carranza was obligated to consult about his actions with us, the men who were authors of the progress of our Revolution, instead of considering himself the chief of absolute power" (III, 146). Nevertheless, he did not break completely from Carranza until September of 1914, because he wanted to preserve unity so that the Revolution could succeed. Carranza's refusal to accept Villa's advice on military matters and his determination not to let Villa become more powerful by winning more battles finally became too much for Villa to bear. At the advice of his generals, he sent a telegram to Carranza, saying, "My division rejects you as First Chief and leaves you at liberty to act as you see fit" (IV, 175). He was convinced that Carranza wanted to remain in the executive office forever, and that he was ruining the position of Mexico in the international situation through his attitude toward the United States troops in Veracruz (IV, 185).

Guzmán has been criticized for "disfiguring" his hero; that is, for emphasizing only his good points. Of course Villa is idealized in Memorias, but this is often done in a historical work dealing with a folk

hero.<sup>8</sup> Although the reader realizes that the account of the Revolution given in this biography is one-sided, the book is nevertheless valuable as one way of looking at a period in history. And perhaps its greatest value lies in the way the author completely lays aside his own personality and comes to think as his central character would.

It has been pointed out in a previous chapter that in El águila y la serpiente it is the leaders, not the fighting masses, who decide the fate of the Revolution. We have said that in Memorias Guzmán maintains this point of view. This is not to say that Villa did not feel that his men were important. Several times in this work, he mentions his men and praises them. For example, after the battle of Torreón, he looks over the battlefield, the bodies of his men, and says,

If these men hadn't sacrificed their lives for the triumph, I wouldn't be here, and neither would Torreón have fallen into my hands. If many men like these had not already died, and many others like them weren't dying now in all the Republic for their loyalty to the Revolution, our Revolution would not prosper, no matter if there were many generals and many chiefs, and no matter if there were many lawyers and many learned men boasting the truth of our cause. (II, 324)

But in spite of the credit Villa gives his men, the reader always realizes that, in this work, it is the decisions made by Villa and other leaders which enable the troops to succeed or fail.

The literary worth of Memorias de Pancho Villa is debated by critics and reviewers. It certainly has not been given the recognition and acclaim that El águila y la serpiente or even Sombra del caudillo have received. Some say that this biography is a failure because Guzmán tried to do an impossible thing in attempting to "become" Pancho Villa. The author thus had to renounce his own style and his own personal vision

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<sup>8</sup>Emilio Abreu Gómez, "Martín Luis Guzmán, crítica y bibliografía," Hispania, XXXV (February, 1952), 70-71.

of Villa.<sup>9</sup> This seems to be an unjust criticism. By writing in the first person, Guzmán certainly imposed limitations on himself. But it is his ability to work within this limitation which gives the biography its literary worth. The author has brought Pancho Villa to life in a truly imaginative fashion, made him speak, and permitted him to justify himself before the world. Memorias merits a place in literature because of this creative act.

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<sup>9</sup>González, pp. 213-214. The same view is also expressed by Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez, p. 531.

## V. Conclusion

How did the Mexican Revolution look when seen through the eyes of Martín Luis Guzmán? First and foremost, it looked like a war in which the leaders were all-important. In all three of his novelistic works, Guzmán emphasizes the importance of real or fictional leaders, both during the fighting of the Revolution and the time for implementation. Carranza, who appears in two novels, is consistently portrayed as one who wanted to be a new caudillo with great power. Villa's portrait, on the other hand, changes from an untamed jaguar to a sincere, though violent, revolutionary. In all three novels, leaders vie for power. Carranza, in both El águila and Memorias, seeks power for self-glorification; Villa in Memorias seeks it so that the people's revolution can be won; politicians in Sombra want power so that they can use it for personal gains. The theme of self-interest of the leaders is seen in all three works also; Villa in Memorias admits it in some of his captains (though never in himself), Aguirre is quite open about this advantage of public office in Sombra, and the self-interest of the leaders is one of the main things which discourages the young, idealistic writer of El águila. All of this emphasis on the leaders reflects the conviction of Guzmán that even after the fighting was over, democracy was not strong in his country, and the Revolution had failed.

The Revolution also looked to Guzmán like a struggle in which harsh reality clashed with idealism. The clash is seen first in the way the



people were used by the leaders who claimed to be fighting for their cause. Sometimes (as in El águila) the people are to be abhorred because of their lack of control over their own actions; sometimes they are to be pitied because of the way in which the leaders use them (as they are in Sombra); sometimes they are to be praised for their willingness to die en masse (as in Memorias). Guzmán also saw this violation of ideals in other ways. Although this theme is most evident in El águila, it can also be seen in the good qualities of Aguirre, which are smothered by the political environment in Sombra. It can be seen in Memorias in the violent acts which Villa justified by saying that they must be done to win a victory for the people.

Closely related to this clash of ideals with reality is the brutality which Guzmán saw in his nation's Revolution. Although he lets Villa justify his brutal acts in Memorias, they are still brutal. In El águila, the only justification for the horrors of war is that once an armed revolt starts, it is almost a law of nature that it become violent and ruthless. In Sombra there is no excuse for such brutalities as the murder of the aguirristas except personal ambitions of the leaders.

Guzmán saw this revolution as one which began in idealism, as seen in El águila and Memorias. The necessities of battle swept the ideals aside, and when the fighting was over (in Sombra), the ideals had been too long neglected--they could not be revived.

It is hard to evaluate the place of Guzmán in his nation's revolution. His good education, his familiarity with other cultures, and his ability as a newspaperman made him a person who could have had a happy influence on the course of the Revolution. But it was not power of the mind which was important during the fighting of the Revolution, so the direct

influence of Guzmán was minimal. Nevertheless, his own convictions about the Revolution, expressed through his literary works, seem to be very sincere. He believed that the Revolution was necessary, because the rights of the people were violated before the Revolution; but he also saw that the Revolution did not wipe such problems away. Guzmán himself participated in the Partido Liberal Progresista, served under Carranza and Villa, then fled from both of them. Therefore his view of the Revolution as a movement of idealism which went sour seems to be sincere opinion rather than a creation of the author for novelistic impact. Guzmán did not decide to write novels about the Mexican Revolution and then create a point of view to express in the novels. Rather, he felt so strongly a certain point of view about the Revolution that he had to express it, and his novels were one way of expression.

A Liberal in the United States, watching the Negro revolution of our own times, can feel that he has much in common with Guzmán. The ideals on which the Negro revolt are based are good; the Liberal supports those ideals. But, like Guzmán, he is frightened by the violence and brutality which seem to come inevitably when those ideals try to find expression. So, like Guzmán, the Liberal of the United States may try to become involved in the first stages of revolt, but may eventually withdraw, disillusioned that ideals cannot become realities without violent and new oppression on the part of the once-oppressed. Like Guzmán, he may content himself with interpreting what is happening.

El águila, Sombra, and Memorias do hold an important place as historical works. Guzmán lived in the times he writes about, and his background gave him tools with which to look below the surface of the course of events in his times. His novelistic works thus interpret the spirit of

Mexico during the Revolution: the idealism, the grappling for power, the caudillism even among men who supposedly fought against such undemocratic practices. Besides understanding his times, Guzmán is able to reveal the personalities of the leaders of the Revolution, and this also makes him important as a historian. His works are more history than those of other novelists because Guzmán covers the whole sweep of the Revolution, from Madero to Calles. Other writers with a stronger desire to write novels and a lesser knowledge of the whole scheme of the Revolution do not give this complete a picture. Why write about these historic events in novelistic form? Perhaps there is in the mind of Guzmán something of the feelings of Miguel Asturias when Asturias said of his own works, "Mejor llamarlas novelas." "Better call them novels," he says, because otherwise people may not accept the truth which they treat. It is better to call Guzmán's works novels, because Mexico may not be able to accept the failures Guzmán saw in the Revolution as facts. It is better to call them novels, because they may be more widely read in this way--and thus can provoke thought about what has happened in Mexico.

So the work of Guzmán is important as history, if one's definition of the past is a broad one which includes the spirit of a new era as well as the events which occurred during that time. But they also have a place as literature, for if they do not exactly conform to orthodox standards for novels, they do take the place of novels during the years after the Revolution. The fact that Guzmán was a newspaperman certainly had an effect on his style. In El águila and Memorias, narration does take precedence over artistry. The events themselves have dramatic power; the creativity and artistry of Guzmán lies in choosing the events and arranging them in such a way that they convey a single impression.

In Sombra Guzmán has his greatest artistic success, as he builds action toward a climax in a way that he does not choose to do in the other two works. Still, each work has its moments of creativity: the image of Villa as his own gun in El águila, the exploration of Aguirre's mind as he is about to be shot in Sombra, the thoughts of Villa as he rides out to his first revolutionary battle in Memorias.

El águila and Sombra are also important as literature because of their position as initiators of the Revolutionary novel. Guzmán joins Azuela as the earliest novelists of this important epoch in Mexico's history. In Antonio Castro Leal's anthology, La novela de la Revolución Mexicana, twenty-one novels are printed, and only those of Azuela were written before Sombra and El águila. Azuela and Guzmán were the first to appropriate the events of 1910-1920 as novelistic material. After them, many other writers followed their example (Muñoz, López y Fuentes, Mancisor, and others).

The declaration that Guzmán cannot properly be called a novelist because his works follow so closely the events of history fails to take into account the nature of the times in which he lived. Participating in such an exciting, perplexing, and varied occurrence as the Mexican Revolution, this intellectual was completely involved in what was happening around him. To create fictional works at such a time would have been impossible for a man in the position of Guzmán. First, reality provided plenty of material for novelistic writing. And second, the novel was not an end in itself for Guzmán, but another way of scrutinizing and helping his countrymen to evaluate and understand what had happened to Mexico. This is why he dwells on the clash of ideals and reality, the degeneration of the leaders from idealistic



dreamers to greedy power-grabbers. This is why he writes about historical events openly or only thinly disguises the historicity of his material (as he does in Sombra). It is for this reason that in studying the novelistic works of Guzmán, it is not so important to study the artistry with which he writes as it is to be able to understand how Guzmán saw the Mexican Revolution.

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